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A
S E R M O N

Preach'd at the Church of

St. Mary le Bow,

TO THE

SOCIETIES

FOR

Reformation of Manners,

December 26. 1698.

By *JOHN HANCOCK, D.D.*
Chaplain to His Grace the Duke
of *Bedford.*

L O N D O N,

Printed for *B. Aylmer,* at the *Three*
Pigeons in *Cornhil,* 1699.

SERMON

Preached in the Church of
St. Mary le Bon

SOCIETIES



By JOHN H. JACKSON, D.D.
Chaplain to His Grace the Duke
of Devon

LONDON:
Printed for M. Sturges, at the Three
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TO THE
SOCIETIES
FOR

Reformation of Manners,

In the Cities of

London and Westminster.

Gentlemen,

I Am sensible this Discourse is too mean to deserve the good Opinion you seem'd to have of it, when you desir'd it might be Printed.

The Dedication.

ed. However since you were
pleas'd to think, it might be
in any measure subservient
to that Noble Design you
have in hand, I submit to
your Judgment ; and such
as it is, I here present it to
your and the Publick View.
All I can say for it is, that
I hope 'tis hearty (as I my
self am) for that good Work
you have Undertaken : Which
that it may, through the
Blessing of God, prosper in
your Hands ; that you may
have all Incouragement from
the

The Dedication.

*the Civil Magistrate ; that
other Places may so far fol-
low your Example, that not
only this City, but the Na-
tion, may find the happy
Effects of your Pious Zeal ;
and that your selves may be
rewarded for it, even in
this World, as I doubt not
you will be in another, is
the earnest Desire and Prayer
of,*

Your Faithful Servant

in the Lord,

John Hancock.



The Dedication.

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this World, as I doubt not
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the earnest Desire and Request
of

Your Faithful Servant

in the Lord,

John Hancock.

JER. V. 29.

*Shall I not visit for these
Things ? Shall not my
Soul be avenged on such
a Nation as this ?*

IN this Chapter the Prophet makes a very lively Representation, and doleful Complaint, of the general defection of *Jerusalem* from their Duty.

This he expresses first in general Terms Ver. 1. *Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a*
B Man

Man, if there be any that executeth Judgment, and I will pardon it.

Which words, I suppose, must be understood as an Hyperbolical Expression, of the great Wickedness of that Age. That is, there were very few that lived a Religious Life, in comparison of the very great numbers that gave themselves up to all Impiety.

And those few that were Religious, were so discouraged, and overborn by the reigning Impieties of the Times, that they durst scarce appear; they were not to be found.

The Case was much the same with respect to Impiety then, as it was with respect to Idolatry in the time of *Abab*. The Prophet thought there were none that kept to the Worship of God, though God had reserved to himself Seven
Thousand

Thouſand that had not bowed the
Knee to the Image of *Baal*.

But though the Prophet could
find no Religion in the Streets, and
broad Places of *Jerusalem*, among
the Common People, he imputes
this in ſome meaſure to their Igno-
rance; yet it ſeem'd reaſonable he
ſhould expect other Things among
the more knowing and better ſort
of People. Ver. 4, 5. *Then I ſaid,
Theſe are poor, they are fooliſh; for
they know not the way of the Lord,
nor the Judgment of their God. I
will get me to the great Men, and
will ſpeak unto them, for they have
known the way of the Lord, and the
Judgment of their God: But theſe
have altogether broken the Yoke, and
burſt the Bonds.*

'Tis ſad to hear, (and yet more
ſad it ſhould be ſuffered,) the Oaths
and dreadful Imprecations, that
grate our Ears, as we walk the
B 2 Streets,

Streets, from the Mouths of the meanest sort of People ; but 'tis some Excuse that some of them perhaps know no better. But that the Rich, and Wise, and Noble, that have more Knowledge, and better Breeding, should stoop so low, as to be guilty of such mean Vices, is a Wonder, and ought to be for a Lamentation. If such will neither consider their Obligations to God, to their Country, or to their own Honour : If they break the *Token* of God's Law, and *burst the Bonds* of their great Obligations to him ; they as well as others, must one day bear their own burthen.

Then the Prophet gives a black Roll of the Impieties of those Times. Some of which I shall take notice of.

*First, Their Idolatry, ver. 7.
How shall I pardon thee for this ?
Thy Children have forsaken me, and
sworn*

sworn by them that are no Gods. God be thanked we have not yet so far forsaken God, as to swear by a false God, (or notwithstanding the late Hopes of our Enemies,) to worship the true God, in an Idolatrous way. But if false and vain Swearing, by the Name of the true God, be Crimes of the blackest dye, the one we see, and the other we have reason to fear, have got too great a footing among us.

Secondly, Their Adultery, ver. 7, 8. When I had fed them to the full, they assembled themselves by troops in the Harlots houses. This I doubt is but too true a description of our Times.

But we are called from the Thoughts of this with the amazing News of some among us, that are sunk into the deepest mire with the very worst of Heathens, as the Apostle gives their Character,

Rom. 1. that are resolved to be Wicked, not only in spite of Reason, and Religion, but of Nature too. If any more of these can be discovered, may they receive from the just Indignation of the Civil Magistrate, *that Recompence of their Error which is meet.*

Thirdly, To mention no more, He reflects upon their incorrigibleness under all God's dealings with them; neither his Judgments, nor his Mercies, had their kindly work upon them. Not his Judgments; ver. 3. *Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive Correction.* Not his Mercies; ver. 24. *Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth Rain, the former and the latter Rain in his season.*

This is too much our own Case. We see but little effect as to all the various

various Dispensations of God to these Nations; neither his Mercies have as yet lead us, nor his Judgments frighted us unto Repentance.

So that we have just Reason to fear, he may say of us, as he did here of the Jews, *Shall I not visit for these things? Shall not my Soul be avenged on such a Nation as this?*

Shall I not visit for these things?

When at any time Sin and Impiety becomes common and almost universal; When it grows bold and impudent; When Men *declare their Sin as Sodom, and hide it not*; When they are so far depraved in their Judgments as to defend it, and are come to Sin upon Principles; When they scoff at Religion, and attempt by pouring the utmost Contempt upon it, to drive it out of the World, especially when there is too general an insensibility of the De-

bauchery of the Times ; we may think it high time for God to appear in vindication of his own Honour, from the Contempt of an ungodly World.

And we may be sure, sooner or later, he will do it. 'Tis very fit we should expect this, whether we consider the Declarations of his Word, or the Methods of his Providence.

I. The Declarations of his Word. Solomon says, *Righteousness will exalt a Nation ; but Sin is the Reproach,* and will be the Ruine of *any People*. The Prophet Esay tells the Jews, Isa. 1. *If they be willing and obedient, they shall eat the Good of the Land ; but if they refuse and rebel, they shall be devoured with the Sword.* But Scriptures to this purpose are so numerous, that 'tis needless to insist upon them.

'Tis

'Tis true the Sins and Impieties of wicked Men, have of themselves (at least many of them) a most pernicious Influence upon the Publick Good. Saint *James* tells us, most of those Wars and Confusions, that infest the World, spring originally from *Mens Lusts*, *that war in their Members*. For Instance;

A prodigal and profuse way of Living, when it grows in Fashion, begets Poverty; that improves into Discontent; which often ends in some Publick Disturbance. How often do Ambition and Covetousness, upon very small occasions, disturb Government, and destroy the Peace and Quiet of the World.

But if this were not so, as long as there is a just God in Heaven, the bold Impieties of Men on Earth, must meet with condign Punishment. Publick Debaucheries will seldom fail to draw down Publick Judgments.

2. This

2. This is agreeable to the Methods of God's Providence. The History of all Ages, is but one continued Confirmation of this Truth. We find it has been so, and we may well conclude it will be so still. We read in the Book of *Judges*, that when the *Israelites* sin'd against God, he rais'd up the most contemptible People to be their Oppressors. So that as it is very fit that God should, so we see he has, and may be sure sooner or later he will, visit for the Wickedness of a People.

Well if these Things be so, how justly may we of these Nations expect the sharpest Visitation ! How may we wonder at the Goodness and Patience of that God that is yet pleas'd to prolong our Tranquility.

God, after all his other Gracious Dispensations, has lately given us
an

an Happy Peace. He seems inclin'd to try us a little longer, whether the milder Methods of his Mercy will work upon us to a general Repentance and Reformation.

But 'tis to be feared we shall do as we have often done before, not become the better, but rather the worse, for his Mercy.

'Twas too obvious to observe, after our Deliverance from the late unhappy Civil Wars, pardon me if I say, we ran mad with our Joy; and too many of us, because Religion had been made a pretence by some, threw off all pretence to it. A sad perversion this of that Goodness of God, the proper End of which was to ingage us to Obedience.

I heartily wish our late Deliverance, and our present Peace, may have a better influence upon us. As yet

yet God knows there is little sign of it. Scepticism and Impiety go hand in hand, and 'tis to be feared, get ground upon us. If that of the Apostle *Phil. 3.* were ever true of any Age, I fear it is of this; *Mens God is their Belly, their Glory in their Shame, they mind Earthly things.* I wish our *End* may not be Destruction too.

We want not indeed, in this Age, an useful and practical way of Preaching, and such as may recommend it self to the Reason, as well as work upon the Passions of Mankind. We have the great Things of another World lively laid before us, and the absolute necessity of a good Life dayly prest upon us.

But the Age is Proof against the Voice of the Charmer, charm he never so wisely. We are boldly told by some, they look upon the great Things of our Religion but as
idle

idle Tales, with publick allowance. And a great many others, though they do not speak out, yet plainly live, as if they had the same Opinion of them.

So that I fear, Infidelity is spread further than we are aware of; and if there should be thus a fault in the Spring, there is like to be no regular Motion in the whole Machine. And no wonder if the generality of Men swim down the stream of Popular Wickedness, and follow a Multitude to do Evil.

In such a Case as this, 'tis highly necessary to call in the Assistance of the Civil Magistrate, and 'tis very much his Interest, as well as Duty, to maintain the Cause of Religion, and to punish open and scandalous Impiety.

If the Terrors of the Lord will not prevail with Men to become
good

good Christians, the Terrors of the Law may make them tolerable Men. And though the inflicting of Legal Penalties may not make Men so Good as they should be, yet 'tis something if it restrain them from being so bad as they would be.

Nor does this imply the weakness and insufficiency of Religion, that it needs the Support of the Civil Power; but only argues the Corruption of Humane Nature, that will not be kept in Bounds without it.

The Sun is not dark, though Men may shut their Eyes, and not see the Light of it: Nor are Things really sweet to be accounted bitter, because they may taste so to some vitiated Palates.

The great Things of Religion are such as are apt to work upon Reasonable Men: But if Men, either
through

through Prejudice, do not believe, or through Carelessness do not consider them, no wonder if they do not prevail upon them.

The laying Penalties upon plain and scandalous Sins, is so far from being unsuitable to the Nature of Religion, that it is a Debt the Civil Power owes to the Honour of God, and the Peace of the World.

Saint Paul, *Rom. 13.* tells us, *That Rulers are not a Terror to Good Works, but to the Evil; and that he is the Minister of God, a Revenger to execute Wrath upon him that doth Evil.* That is, a good Ruler, one that answers the Design of his Office, will be so.

How this can be, without the enacting and inflicting of some Penalties, something that is terrible to Humane Nature, is not easie to imagine. For the bare Command
of

of them, that we are sure either cannot, or will not hurt us, is not very dreadful.

And here we may thankfully acknowledge our Happiness, that the Law is yet a Guard to the Practice of Religion : And the Legislative Power hath given its Testimony, against Vice and Irreligion, by making it Penal to be guilty of it. For this, I may refer you to the many Acts of Parliament made against Profaneness, particularly that against Swearing, and other Vices, ordered to be read, once a Quarter, in our Churches.

His Majesty likewise hath been graciously pleased to shew His Zeal, for the work of Reformation, not only by issuing out His Royal Proclamations, strictly requiring inferior Magistrates, to put the Penal Laws, against Vice and Profaneness, in execution : But by recommend-
ing

ing it, more than once, to the Consideration of the Parliament, to take yet a more effectual Course to stop the Growth of Irreligion.

This so needful work of Reformation therefore lies in a manner, at our own doors.

Two Things therefore are requisite in this Case.

1. That those that have any Power or Authority should Conscientiously use it, to the Countenancing of Religion, and to the Punishment of Vice and Profaneness.

2. That all of us, in our several Stations, and according to our Opportunities and Abilities, should concur with them, and put our Hands to this good Work.

C

Under

Under the First Head, I must reckon Parents in the Family, and Inferiour Magistrates in the Commonwealth.

As to Parents, I cannot forbear to say, I am apt to believe, that their Neglect in the Education of their Children, is one, at least, of the most universal Causes of that Impiety that reigns among us. This (as some Physicians speak of the Natural Body) is that Error in the first concoction, that is not to be thoroughly amended in the second. When Families, that are the Elements of the Body Politick, are so much neglected, and so far corrupted, the Constitution of it must needs be very crazy. And on the contrary, did Parents take that Care, they ought to give their Children a timely sence of Religion, of their Duty to God and Man, and *bring them up in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord*, the work of the Civil

Civil Magistrate would be in a great measure done to his Hand, and we should need fewer Laws, and less Courage and Resolution in the execution of them.

2. I will make bold to speak a word to those that are subordinate Magistrates in the State. That they would, with Zeal and Vigour, put those good Laws we have in execution against the scandalous Vices of the Age. That they would take all Occasions, and lay hold on Opportunities, to stop the Growth of Impiety and Irreligion: At least that, if they think it not incumbent on themselves to seek for Informations, they would readily and cheerfully receive them, and not discourage those whose Pious Zeal prompts them to be Instrumental to bring Enormous Offenders to Punishment. And that they would take care to live such innocent and inoffensive Lives themselves,

selves, that they may set a good Face upon the Punishment of Offenders.

But I will not insist too long on this. I shall only very briefly remind them, how much the Honour of God, and of the Government, is concerned in this matter. That they are under the Oath of God. That the execution, and by consequence, the good effect of those wholesome Laws we have against Profaneness, lyes in a manner wholly in their Hands, and the miscarriage will, in a great measure, lye at their Doors. That they have an Opportunity of doing an act of the greatest Charity to the Publick; nay, and as it may happen, to the Offenders themselves. And lastly, the immortal Honour that will accrue to themselves. If they signalize themselves by their Zeal in this good Work, not only this, but the
next

next Generation, may rise up, and call them blessed.

2. It is the Duty of every one of us, in our several Stations, to put our helping Hand to this good Work.

And that we may be the better induced to do this in good earnest, let us be deeply sensible of the Sins of the Times. Let us often think how sad the consequence will be, of such a general defection from the Duties of Religion. Let us be heartily sorry we can do no more toward the Work of Reformation. 'Twas not below *David*, though a King, even to weep for the Wickedness of other Men. If we have any sence of Piety to God, we cannot but be heartily concern'd at his Dishonour. If we have any Charity for Men, it cannot but grieve us to see them running so fast, in the ready way, to Ruine and Destruction.

struction. If we have any concern for the Publick, we must needs be apprehensive of the Danger we are in, to be overwhelm'd by these Floods of Ungodliness.

If we could do nothing else, yet we should, at least, secretly bewail the Impieties of the Times we live in. But this inward sense will naturally prompt us to do our best, not only to stem the tide of Sin our selves, but to turn it towards a Reformation.

(1.) Then let us make a free, open, publick, and avowed Profession of the Truths and Rules of our Religion. We need not be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, while we are sure, it is the Power of God unto Salvation. While we have both the Law of God and Man to justify us, why should not we be as bold for Religion, as the most profest and impudent Sinner
can

can be against it ? How indecent is it, while Sin puts on a Whores Forehead, that Religion should creep into a Corner.

Mistake me not, I am not now perswading you to pretend to more than you have, to make an Hypocritical and Pharisaical Pretence to Piety, but only that you would openly avow the Obligations that lye upon you to an Holy Life. And therefore,

(2.) Be sure your Practice keep pace with your Profession, and that you really be what you pretend to be, Good Christians ; and make this appear before the World in the whole tenour of your Conversation.

Our Blessed Saviour, who blames the *Pharisees*, that they did all their Works to be seen of Men (and 'twas no better than Hypocrisie,

while their whole Design was the Praise of Men) yet in another place bids us, *Let our Light so shine before Men, that they may see our good Works, and glorifie our Father which is in Heaven.* That is, be so strictly Holy, that the World cannot chuse but take Notice of it; tho' for any value we set upon the Praise of Men, we may not care much whether they do or no.

We see Examples have a mighty Power and Influence upon the Lives of Men. They are apt to follow a *Multitude*, though it be to do Evil. O that we could once see it as Fashionable to be Vertuous and Religious, as it has too long been to be Loose and Vicious; or at least, Negligent and Lukewarm. Let us do God and Religion, and our selves, the Honour, (if I may so speak,) to begin the Mode, and do our best to bring Religion into Fashion.

And

And who can tell how far some considerable number of Religious Examples, shining as Lights in the midst of this crooked and perverse Generation might enlighten the World.

And though there might some Hypocrisie creep in, yet methinks that is much to be preferred before open Profaneness ; and 'twere better that God and Religion should be (though it were but seemingly) honour'd, by some Pretenders to Religion, than openly affronted by Profane and Loose Men.

Let us then by an open and avowed Profession, and Practice of a substantial and unaffected Piety, declare against the Wickedness of the Age, and by our Examples, at least, lead the way to a Reformation.

(3.) Let us by our Advice, Admonition and Reproof, do what we
can

can to reform others too. 'Tis pity this is so much disused, that it is almost counted a piece of Rudeness, to make any approaches towards it. This Fraternal Correction is very well consistent with Civility, and is an act of the greatest Charity too. *Lev. 19. 17. Thou shalt not hate thy Brother in thine Heart : Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour, and not suffer Sin upon him.* Not to rebuke him, is to suffer Sin upon him; and this is in effect to hate him.

Should we see our Brother infected with a dangerous Disease, it would be very uncharitable not to warn him of it. Should we see him running on a Precipice, Humanity would oblige us to stop his course. And yet we can see him infected with the mortal Plague of Sin, and running on the Precipice of Eternal Destruction, and not kindly admonish him of his Danger.

There

There is scarce any one with whom we converse, but when there is occasion, we might this way be serviceable to Religion. If he be an Inferiour we might rebuke him sharply. If he be an Equal, we might admonish him freely as a Brother. If he be a Superiour, we might at least humbly intreat him as a Father. And this practice would no doubt give some check to Sin and Wickedness.

But it must be confest, that it is not all Sinners that are fit Objects of this compassionate Admonition. There are many too hardy to be dealt with by such mild and gentle Methods. Our Saviour, who no doubt designed we should take all prudent and likely ways to reform our Brother, yet bids us not to cast our Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their feet.

This

This is, I doubt, the Case with too many ; and then it very well becomes us to tell it to the Civil Magistrate, whom the Law impowers and requires to punish Evil-doers.

'Tis true, the Name of Informer sounds somewhat odious, and may seem not very agreeable to the Spirit and Temper of a Christian. And indeed to lye at catch, to insnare our Brother, in some minuter things that the Law has made Penal, where the Honour of God, and the Good of Society, are not much concern'd, is to be condemned.

But there is a great difference between those Things that have neither Good nor Evil in them, but as the Law commands or forbids them, and those that are Evil in themselves. Again, there is a considerable difference among those things
that

that are Evil in themselves, some are more private, and chiefly affect the Person that commits them ; others more immediately tend to debauch others, affect Society, and spread Irreligion. Again, some Sins are committed more openly, and consequently are a greater Scandal to Religion, Dishonour to God, and Affront to Authority.

Now in gross and enormous Sins, especially when they are committed openly, and so are a greater Scandal to Religion, when they grow bold and are often repeated, when they spread and grow infectious ; then 'tis absolutely necessary, by Temporal Punishments, to put a stop to them. And 'tis for the Honour of God, for the Good of Society, for the Safety of other Men, nay, and may be for the Good of the Offenders themselves, that they come under the Lash of the Law. And 'tis well becoming the Piety of a Christian,

ftian, to be Instrumental in bringing them under the Inflictions of Legal Punishments.

Indeed common Swearers, notorious Drunkards, Adulterers, and other fuch like, are mostly got beyond all milder Methods : They are many times fet in the Seat of the Scorners ; they defpife and laugh at sober Admonitions, and there is no other way to deal with them, but by touching them in their moft fenfible part. For if they can but fave their Bodies and Eftates, they have little care of their Souls.

Now it may be an act of Charity to make fuch People fmart for their Sins. When they are ftopt in the career of their Lufts, it may fet them a thinking of their Folly, and bring them to a better Mind. Or if it do not, it will at leaft be fome restraint upon their Wickednefs.

How-



However this (as I have partly hinted before) is necessary upon many other accounts.

It is for the Good of the Body Politick that such noxious Humours may be purged out, or kept under, that the whole Mass of Blood be not corrupted. 'Tis for the Honour of God that Justice should be done upon such open and notorious Sinners as have highly affronted him, and disparaged Religion. 'Tis necessary to bear Testimony against such crying Sins, that we become not partakers with them; and if possible may prevent those heavy Judgments of God, that we may justly fear may be doomed against the Nation for them, and we are sure are justly deserved by them.

'Tis further to be considered that most Men allow themselves the liberty of appealing to the Civil Magistrate, upon every little and trifling

fling Interest that concerns themselves : If their Neighbour but touch their Bodies, they call it an Assault and Battery ; or if he call them an hard Name, or give them a disparaging or reviling Word, they must presently have the Peace, or the Good Behaviour, or bring an Action against him, or, it may be, send him a Challenge, for Satisfaction : But the Sacred Name of God may be daily profaned by Oaths and Hellish Imprecations, his Majesty affronted by the most horrid Blasphemies ; and if any call for Justice on such impudent Sinners, there are enough will think him more busie than wise in so doing. This is the grossest partiality, and I doubt such Mens Judgments are too much brib'd and byass'd by their Lusts.

I would ask such Men ; do they indeed believe it fit the Magistrate should let every one do what is
Good

Good in his own Eyes, affront God and Religion as he pleases ?

If it be a Pious Act in the Legislative Power to Enact Laws for the Guard of Religion ; and in the King, to make choice of such Subordinate Magistrates as will be zealous in the execution of them ; and in such Magistrates impartially without Fear or Favour, to inflict the Penalties by Law appointed on Offenders when Information is given ; it must equally be so in any private Man to give such Information : For without Information given, there can be none, or very little, execution of the Law ; and without that, 'tis all one as if neither Laws were made, nor Magistrates appointed for that purpose. Well then, this work of informing against notorious Sinners is so far from being to be blamed, that (if I may make bold to say so) I think it a defect in our Law, that it is not made Penal not

to give Information. We know it is so in cases of Treason; he that does not discover it, is so far a partaker in it, as to be guilty at least of Misprision of it.

If we were as truly concern'd for the Honour of God, as we justly are for the Honour and Safety of the King, methinks there would some such thing be done. And every one that hears the horrid Oaths and Imprecations that are so common among us, that knows of those that haunt naughty Houses, or those that make a practice of carousing in Taverns or Ale-houses when they should be at Church, should be liable to some severe Penalties, if they do not give in Information.

It were to be wish'd some such Course could be taken, that a Pious and Sober Man might come in Company, walk the Streets, and go about his Business, without hear-
ing

ing God and Religion so impudently affronted as usually they are.

But alas how shall this be done? What single Man dares undertake so hard a Task, or make any attempt towards a Reformation? When the Offenders are so many, the work of reforming like to meet with the spight and obloquy of the Bad, the Censure of some of the better sort, and the Approbation and Incouragement of so very few; when there is so general a Slackness in the Magistrates, and such Insensibility in the People, as to the Work of Reformation, what shall we think of it?

This Work, or Trade, of Reformation (pardon me if I call it so; though 'twill be no gainful one to them that take it up) is so new, and out of the common Road, 'tis like to meet with so much opposition from the Devil's Factors, and

requires so great a stock of Zeal, and Christian Courage and Resolution, that 'tis never like to thrive in a few single Hands : If ever it be carried on to purpose, it must be by a Company.

What I have already said, abundantly justifies the Pious Zeal of those, in and about this City, that have thought of this Expedient, and are in several Societies combined together for the carrying on of so good a Work.

We hope this has, and will, at least in some measure, strike a damp on the daring Impiety of the Times.

The good Example of those who have already begun this Work, may not only incourage others to joyn in it, but may in time spread it self throughout the Nation. And 'tis to be hoped the good Effects of such Religious Combinations as these, will

will recommend them, in a little time, even to those who have been a little jealous of what might be the Consequence of them.

It is apparent enough there is great need of this, or some such Expedient, to give check to the growth of Debauchery among us.

If I be not much mistaken, there is a sort of Men that are not only resolved to give themselves up to all manner of Wickedness, but make it their Business to proselite all they can to their Irreligion, and to make all they converse with as Bad as themselves.

I have been told there are some Clubs in this City, where the very profest Design of their Meeting is, by obscene Discourse and other ways, to promote Lewdness and Debauchery. These (if it be true,) are Devilish Combinations indeed; and

'tis high time, for those that have a true Zeal for God and for Religion, to joyn their Hearts and Hands to break these Bonds of Wickedness.

Give me leave, before I conclude, to give a word of Advice to those of you that are entered into any such Society for Reformation, and it shall be briefly this.

1. That you would be very careful how you live your selves. The World will have their Eye upon you : And there will be those that will watch for your halting.

How much would it dishonour God, disparage your selves, and hinder that good Work you go about, if any of you, that pretend to reform others, should at any time be guilty of the same Crimes, or as bad your selves?

2. That

2. That you would joyn Prudence with your Zeal. Perhaps some would think it more prudent to let the whole Work alone ; but this, I hope, you do not think is my meaning : But that you take care to go no further than the Law will back you ; and that you would manage every circumstance of your Proceedings with as much Caution and Discretion, as is consistent with the doing of the Work you go about.

3. That you be Impartial in this Business, as to Persons and Parties ; and that in your whole procedure you make it appear, as far as may be, that it is not Interest or Faction, or private Grudges and Resentments, by which you are acted, but by a true and disinterested Zeal for God, for Religion, and the Good of your Country ; yea, and even of the Offenders themselves.

D 4

4. When

4. When you have done this, that you would be Humble and Modest, and not presently think too highly of your selves ; nor despise others, (so they live well,) as Men of no Religion, because they are not come up to your pitch, or do not shew their Zeal for Religion in the same way with your selves ; (nay, tho' they should seem a little jealous of your Societies,) but be content that time should shew (as I hope it will) the Uprightness of your Intentions, and the Wisdom of your Undertakings.

While you observe these, and the like Cautions, that your Christian Prudence may dictate to you, go on in the Name and Strength of God, and be not discouraged by all the Difficulties you are like to meet in your way to Reformation.

The

The Honour of God, and the Good of Men, the promoting of Religion, and the Safety of your Country (Things so nearly concern'd in this Work of Publick Reformation) are such Great and Glorious Things, as will make an ample amends for all the Expence of Cost or Pains you can be at in the pursuit of it, and for all the Reproach and Obloquy you can meet with for it,

And such you must expect to meet with ; and therefore should make account of it, and prepare for it, and not over-much value what Men may say of you.

Some perhaps will call you busie-bodies ; others will tell you 'tis a mean and disparaging Thing to turn Informers ; a third sort will think you surly and ill-natur'd Men.

These,

These, and the like truly ill-natur'd Imputations, you must expect to meet with, and prepare your selves to bear.

But while you are conscious to your selves, that what you do is not out of any delight in the Sufferings of other Men, nor with an Eye to any by and base Interest of your own, but out of pure Zeal for God and Vertue, and Charity to Men, and out of a due sence of the odiousness and danger of those horrid Impieties that reign among us; the Conscience of this your Sincerity will bear you up under the obloquy and opposition of any that shall appear against you, and you will even rejoyce, as we read the Apostles did, if you should suffer Shame for the Name of God, and the sake of Religion.

If

If you go on courageously in this Work, 'tis to be hoped it may be a good step to a General Reformation.

Or if the Wickedness of the Age be grown too big for that, it may abate the Impudence of Sin, and drive the Works of Darknes (where if any where, they ought to be,) into private corners, that Wickedness may not any longer, as it has too long done, ride triumphant through our Streets And this will prevent a great deal of the Scandal of it, and be a guard and security to that little Religion that is yet left among us.

Or if this cannot be done, it will be a publick Testimony against the Wickedness of the Age, and we hope may, in part, appease the Wrath of God, and for some longer

ger time prevent his heavy Judgments upon the Nation.

Or if the Decree be gone out against us, and the Case be with us as it was with *Judah*, that the Reformation attempted in the Reign of *Josiah*, could not avert the Destruction doom'd against them for their former Wickedness : Yet it may be hoped, those that have so vigorously appear'd for God and Religion, may deliver their own Souls by their Righteousness.

Or if such an overflowing Scourge must pass through the Land, as will involve the best in the common Ruin, those that have first reform'd themselves, and done what they could in their several Stations to reform others too, will have the Comfort of it in the Day of Visitation. Such Good Men will have an inward Calm and Serenity amidst

midst the greatest outward Troubles here, and their Pious Zeal will meet with an abundant Recompence in the World to come, from that God in whose Cause they have appeared. To Him be all Honour, and Glory, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

F I N I S.
